

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE E-16

THE WASHINGTON POST
9 September 1982

JACK ANDERSON

Tough Stance Followed Fear Of Begin Plans

The story behind President Reagan's sudden firmness with Israel over the West Bank is told in secret State Department dispatches. They make clear what Reagan's advisers fear Israel might do in the occupied territory unless deterred by the United States.

One secret report seen by my associate Dale Van Atta puts it bluntly and ominously: "There is reason to fear that the Israeli government might capitalize on demonstrations in the occupied territories, or even provoke such demonstrations, in order to expel large numbers of Arabs as 'security risks.' [Israeli] defense officials admit such contingency plans exist."

It's no laughing matter to accuse an ally of willingness to stage a provocation, especially an ally with as much domestic political clout as Israel has. So it is a measure of the concern that top U.S. officials have over Prime Minister Menachem Begin's actions and suspected intentions that they unanimously urged the president to get tough with Israel. If Alexander M. Haig Jr. had still been secretary of state, the pres-

ident might have held out, at least until after the November elections.

Why would Israel want to expel "large numbers of Arabs" from the West Bank territory it captured in the 1967 war? The resources—land and water—of the West Bank cannot support many more than the 800,000 Palestinians and 20,000 Jewish settlers now living there.

Yet Israel continues to build new settlements in the disputed area; one Israeli official has stated publicly that he wants 250,000 Jews living there by 1987. To achieve this goal, about an equal number of Arabs would have to be kicked out.

To buttress their suspicions of Israel's ultimate goal for the West Bank, State Department and CIA experts point to a pattern of repression by Israeli military occupation forces that has emerged over the past 15 years.

Punishment for actual or alleged support of Palestinian terrorist groups has always been draconian: Houses of relatives or sympathizers are blown up, and 24-hour curfews are imposed. Collective punishment on villages is often exacted for the crimes of a few inhabitants. Harassment of Arabs by armed gangs of Jewish religious zealots is routinely winked at by the occupation authorities.

The State Department used to send its own observers into the West Bank to investigate allegations of repression, but it stopped the practice

when contents of the incriminating cables were leaked, embarrassing both the Israelis and the U.S. government, which did nothing to stop the incidents.

Over the years, I have sent my own reporters to the West Bank—Ron McRae in 1980, Peter Grant in 1981, and Van Atta just a few weeks ago. They talked to both Israeli and Arab sources, and their reports made clear the pattern of Israeli behavior.

I talked to Begin about the West Bank in Jerusalem recently, and this is what he said: Israel is willing to grant "total autonomy" to the West Bank Arabs, allowing them their own civil administration.

But the catch—and it's a big one—is this: Israel would be the protector of the West Bank. There would be no Arab army, only Israeli troops.

By their own civil administrators, Begin presumably meant the village leagues, organizations of Arabs who are not inflamed by Palestinian nationalism and are willing to live in an Israeli protectorate. Needless to say, fervent Palestinian nationalists regard them as Israeli puppets.

There seems increasing reason to believe that Begin and his top associates intend to keep the West Bank. Whether they do it by outright annexation or in the guise of a protectorate, this is sure to keep the Palestinian issue boiling. That's why Reagan was persuaded to make his rhetorical pre-emptive strike.